# Hysterectomy Basics

Learn more about this treatment option for uterine fibroids.

May 31, 2022 By Jeanette L. Pinnace

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Depending on her medical situation, when a woman undergoes a hysterectomy, she may have either part or all of her uterus removed. The latter procedure, called a radical hysterectomy, includes the removal of tissue on the sides of the womb and the cervix.

A permanent solution to uterine fibroids and the problems caused by these usually noncancerous tumors, hysterectomy is considered by many doctors to be the most effective way to treat the condition.

The surgery is also used to resolve endometriosis, a disorder that occurs when tissue such as the one that lines the uterus grows outside the area. Hysterectomy is also used to treat endometrial hyperplasia, a thickening of the uterine lining; uterine prolapse, a collapse of the uterus into the vagina; obstruction of the bladder or intestines by the uterus; and endometrial cancer.

Many women with fibroids aren't bothered by them. But the condition can be dangerous if the tumors grow and press on certain organs, block the fallopian tubes or trigger heavy menstrual bleeding or chronic pain in the pelvic area.

When determining whether a hysterectomy is the best option for a woman with uterine fibroids, a physician will consider overall health and reproductive goals, as the surgery results in a woman being unable to have children.

In a traditional open surgery hysterectomy, a surgeon removes the uterus via an incision across the belly. In a minimally invasive procedure, such as a vaginal hysterectomy, the uterus is removed via an incision in the vagina.

Surgeons can also use a laparoscope—a tube with an attached camera—and surgical tools inserted through small cuts in the belly to perform a laparoscopic hysterectomy. Known as

“keyhole surgery,” this is a way for doctors to remove a woman’s womb, cervix and any other parts of her reproductive system.

But because not everyone is a candidate for minimally invasive procedures, women should discuss all options with their doctor for the best surgical outcomes.

Most often, women who undergo a hysterectomy experience relatively few issues after surgery. However, any kind of hysterectomy is major surgery and involves risks such as wound infection, blood clots and hemorrhage.

Specific complications from hysterectomies may include urinary incontinence, vaginal prolapse (the vagina protruding outside the body) and chronic pain.

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